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Picture by Nick Summers

VP speaks out

A senior college leader has criticised the National Apprenticeship Service (NAS) for an over-reliance on success rates and the growth in short duration apprenticeships.

Scott Upton (pictured left), vice principal of Sandwell College, said he was “calling NAS to book” over the mismanagement of financial risk in the sector.

Mr Upton, one of the speakers at the first Apprenticeships England conference last Wednesday, said: “The idea is that they will do assessments of providers on a risk basis.

“But how are they judging the risk?

“Are you saying great, they have got 1,000 people through and they have got 100 per cent success rates, so they must be alright?

“Or this lot have got a bit of a dip on hairdressing last year, because the girls were all involved in a punch up down the high street or whatever, so let’s get the auditors in now and look at it?”

“Do you not think that’s all sort of

wrong?”

Mr Upton, wearing a t-shirt with the slogan ‘Frankie says scam’, accused training providers of “hoovering up” thousands of learners and enrolling them on low level frameworks for a short period of time.

The vice principal said these firms were inflating the national success rate and damaging the reputation of the apprenticeship programme.

“On a 12 week apprenticeship, or one of these battery farm apprenticeships, or one of these large supermarket led apprenticeships, I bet you get damn near to 100 per cent success rates,” Mr Upton said.

“So what does that do - that inflates the whole national success rate.

“That means if you’re doing the sticky stuff - if you’re doing engineering, if you’re doing construction, stone masonry or whatever, where it’s harder and more difficult - it’s okay because all this lot over here have got 100 per cent success rates and that’s probably where they’ll keep feeding the money.”

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UCU re-elects Hunt



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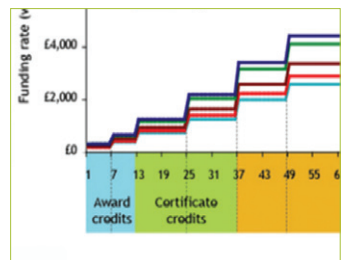
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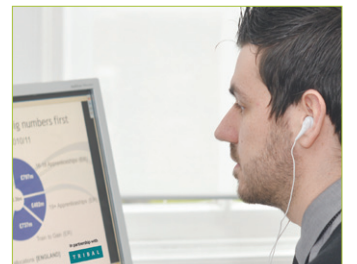
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Accounting for durations

FE Week Exclusive

Nick Summers

@SummersNicholas

NAS confirm that 12 month minimum duration will apply to each level of the apprenticeship

Apprenticeship providers should not be able to deliver multiple levels of a framework in less than 12 months, according to the National Apprenticeship Service (NAS).

The NAS say they are working with training providers such as Aspire Achieve Advance Ltd, which runs a programme qualifying learners at three different levels in 14 months, to ensure their delivery is compliant.

A NAS spokesperson said: “An apprenticeship framework is made up of different qualifications and will reflect what the Issuing Authority recognises as appropriate for an apprenticeship in that particular sector – however different levels would usually constitute different apprenticeship programmes.

“The framework document for accountancy gives an expectation that the Level 2 would take 12 months and the Level 3 and Level 4 would each take between 12 and 18 months.

“Where necessary we are working with providers to change their delivery models to be fully compliant.”

The Accounting Academy Partnership (AAP) is one of four divisions run by Aspire Achieve Advance Ltd, a provider with subcontracts totalling £9.7 million part owned by Di McEvoy-Robinson, former principal of West Nottinghamshire College.

The first apprentices enrolled by AAP, described by McEvoy-Robinson as “bright young things”, started in March last year and are expected to complete in May.

McEvoy-Robinson says the achievement rates, which are above the national average at 95 per cent for Level 2 and 90 per cent for Level 3, justify the duration of the programme.

“They’re all very well educated in terms of their GCSEs, in the main - they have to have at least five at A to C to get on the programme,” McEvoy-Robinson said.

“So yes, my answer is it’s definitely appropriate to do all three levels in 14

months.”

AAT, the awarding body for the accounting technician qualification delivered by AAP, says although the delivery model isn’t suitable for every provider, there is still “much to recommend about it”.

“AAT does not prescribe how long each level should take beyond the published guided learning hours,” an AAT spokesperson said.

“We are assured that in the 14 month model guided learning hour requirements are more than met because of the balance of time apprentices spend in college.”

Apprentices recruited by the AAP spend three days a week learning in an FE college before working with the employer for two days.

McEvoy-Robinson says the employer pays the apprentice for between 30 and 37 hours each week, although in reality they only work for two days.

Despite this, the NAS website states: “Employment must be for at least 30 hours per week, except in the

minority of circumstances where the learner cannot complete the full 30 hours.

“In these cases employment must be for more than 16 hours per week.”

AAT says the balance between learning and working on the job is “justified” by AAP.

An AAT spokesperson said: “Accountancy is unusual as an apprenticeship framework in that the skills and underpinning knowledge components are linked within the qualification. One consequence is that all underpinning skills/knowledge assessments are college-based.

“AAT therefore considers that the balance in the 14 month model is justified.”

A spokesperson from Financial Skills Partnership, the Sector Skills Council for finance, accountancy and financial services, told FE Week: “we are unable to discuss this at this stage as it [AAP] is currently under review by NAS and the Skills Funding Agency.”

inside...



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Let the tendering begin: UKCES launch EOS pilot

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The UK Commission for Employment and Skills (UKCES) has released the application forms and guidance document for the Employer Ownership of Skills (EOS) pilot.

The tender documents, released last week, outline how businesses can bid for up to £250 million of direct government funding over the next two years.

The first round of provision, worth £50 million, will pay for projects which deliver skills development and vocational training, such as apprenticeships, from August 2012 to the end of July 2014.

Skills minister John Hayes said: "The government recognises that it is businesses themselves that are best placed to judge what skills they need to grow.

"That is why we are stepping back and empowering companies by giving them direct access to funding and the freedom to create training programmes, including apprenticeships that directly address skills gaps."

The guidance document published by UKCES asks employers to explain the "package" of activities which they hope to offer, but does not suggest which skills should be developed.

"It is an opportunity for employers to propose where and how Government and employers can co-invest most intelligently," the guidance document states.

Successful bids from small and medium sized enterprises (SMEs) will receive a minimum investment of £250,000 from the government.

Large employers and enterprises, or those bidding as part of a consortium, will receive at least £1 million in comparison.

The guidance document states that bids should have a particular emphasis on "ensuring a substantial and meaningful learning experi-

ence" for young people aged 16 to 18.

It later adds that proposals should include apprenticeships as a 'core element' alongside additional recruitment schemes such as work experience.

The application form, also published last week, says submissions will need to demonstrate how the additional training will be designed and led by employers, as well as how it addresses the skills needs of an industry, sector, supply chain or locality.

The form also says bids will need to show how the proposed project will "contribute to the long term growth or performance" of employers which are involved.

The Forum of Private Business (FPB) say the application process appears to be "a particularly long winded process."

An FPB spokesperson said: "Employers are already drowning under mountains of paperwork so more complicated form filling on this scale will no doubt turn off many employers.

"This is also a bidding process - so no guarantee of success at the end - this is unlikely to make it look any more attractive.

"For larger firms with the manpower spare to go through this process it might not be a problem, but for smaller firms which don't have that luxury this looks like a minefield they will want to avoid."

The guidance document says employers will need to show that their proposal will provide additional activity and development, rather than training which would have occurred regardless.

Training excluded from the first round of bidding includes driving lessons and piloting skills, as well as one off training sessions designed to meet employers' legal requirements, such as first aid, food safety and health and safety.

The pilot is also not designed to fund learning or further training delivered through higher education. Bids for the first round of funding need to be submitted by April 26, 2012.

FE Week news in brief

No-notice Ofsted pilot

Education regulator Ofsted has begun piloting no-notice inspections in FE.

In the first of a new regular column in *FE Week*, Matthew Coffey, national director of learning and skills at Ofsted, revealed the first pilot took place last week.

The aim is to test the "logistical challenges" and review the benefits of no-notice inspections.

A consultation, 'A good education for all', on the plan is already underway.

To read the Mr Coffey's *FE Week* FE Expert piece, see page 7.

Funding feedback

Initial feedback shows a "mixed response" to the 16-19 Funding Consultation.

Jane Cowell, director of funding policy, during the YPLA's January board meeting, talked members through early feedback on responses. The consultation concluded on January 4 and the DfE are in the process of analysing 700 responses.

An early analysis of 500 indicates there is a mixed feedback on many of the options, said Mrs Cowell. The Board agreed to establish a sub group of experts to provide advice on the impact of changes to the funding formula.

Merger consultation

A consultation has begun on the proposed merger of Leek College and the University of Derby.

The draft proposal for the proposed merger is available on the Skills Funding Agency's website.

Under the proposal, Leek College will retain its own name, identity and physical presence within the centre of Leek, and it will work more closely with Buxton College, which is part of the University of Derby Group.

The consultation will run from March 9 to April 13.

Majority of extra HE places won by colleges

Nick Reinis
@fenickr

More than half of 'margin' student places - with tuition fees of less than £7,500 - have been handed to further education (FE) colleges.

A total of 20,000 places have been divided by the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) between 190 universities and colleges.

However, 9,643 places have been distributed between 35 higher education institutions (HEIs), with 10,354 places between 155 FE colleges. It comes after a bidding process which began in October when HEFCE published its approach to implementing the control on the number of full-time students universities and colleges can recruit for 2012-13.

Ministers announced plans for "core and margin" places in a White Paper last year, months after MPs voted to raise tuition fees in England to a maximum of £9,000 per year.

A statement from HEFCE said: "The core and margin process was introduced by the government with the aim of increasing student choice and supporting a more diverse higher education sector."

Bids were assessed on "criteria of quality, demand and cost" and only those with average fees of £7,500 or less were eligible.

HEFCE received bids from 203 institutions for 36,000 places. Direct funding will be given to 65 FE colleges they did not fund in 2011-12.

These include Hartpury College and Newham College of Further Education, which secured 352 and 294 places respectively.

However, Nick Davy, HE policy manager at the Association of Colleges, said some universities had withdrawn places from the sector.

He said: "The quality of college bids through the core and margin system has led to an allocation of around 10,500 additional full time student numbers for the sector - an increase of 25 per cent on present numbers.

"However, this figure is brought down

substantially by the practice of universities withdrawing indirect student numbers from the sector."

The AoC's latest research, from December, shows more than 26 per cent of colleges indirectly funded by HEIs are experiencing a cut of 10 per cent of places or more.

Also, 14 per cent of those colleges have been informed by a partner HEI that they intend to withdraw all entrant student numbers from 2012.

Mr Davy added: "AoC estimates that the growth in entrant numbers actually is nearer to seven per cent, a long way from the government's intention to significantly support degree level growth in the college sector.

"The core and margin system is thus a complicated step in promoting growth in degree level courses charging below £6,000 a year.

"AoC would argue that there needs to be a considerable increase in margin places to achieve the government aim of creating a more cost effective and accessible HE sector."

Landslide leadership victory at the UCU for Sally Hunt

Nick Reinis

@fenickr

The general secretary of the University and College Union (UCU) is pledging to put more resources at the frontline after securing a landslide re-election.

Sally Hunt retained the post after defeating her only opponent Mark Campbell by a margin of 6,835 votes. She won 73 per cent of votes cast.

The huge margin of victory is more than five times greater than when Sally was elected as UCU's first general secretary in 2007, when she won by 1,346 votes, although she faced more opponents during that election.

Despite her massive majority, Sally told *FE Week*: "On a personal level, it was a relief," before adding: "It's not something you ever get used to."

One of the key themes of Sally's manifesto was to expand UCU's employment and legal resources, so members can get "even faster advice and representation", while also increasing the amount of union staff working in support of negotiators.

A ballot for which, Sally says, will be sent out next week.

To do this, she intends to reduce UCU's national executive committee from its current membership of 70 to "no more than 40" in the future.

She said: "College staff play a vital role



in society and they deserve better than to have their pensions attacked, pay frozen and the services they provide threatened with privatisation.

"UCU's role today is not just to protect members' professional interests, but also to stand up for the value of education itself.

"Improving support for members and branches in the current climate is not an optional extra, it is essential to protect our people wherever they work.

"I stood on a platform of improving services for members and supporting branches, campaigning on what matters and giving members more say in the union's decisions.

"Achieving this will mean making difficult choices such as reducing the size of our national executive committee to that of other unions in order to put more resources on the front line."

Another key theme of her manifesto was for UCU's membership to have a "greater participation" in union activities.

Sally wants members to have a "direct say" in what UCU does and cites the recent ad-hoc ballots, on issues such as membership to the Institute for Learning, as an example for how they can build on this in the future.

She said: "Any union that wants to function, and function well, has to have a way of encouraging its members to engage in key decisions."

However, despite the plea for greater involvement in key decisions, the election itself saw just a 12.8 per cent turnout.

Sally said: "I wasn't surprised (by the turnout).

"I would have liked it to be larger, but I wrote to members four times by e-mail and every member got the option to see the manifesto."

Another priority for Sally will be the sale of Britannia House, in North London.

As previously reported by *FE Week*, the building was proposed for sale at an estimated price of £12 million after the merger of the National Association of Teachers in Further and Higher Education (NATFHE) and the Association of University Teachers (AUT) to form the UCU in June 2006.

However, with the building unsold, concerns have been raised about the union's ability to pay off its debts, while UCU insists it is "unwise" to gauge what the financial

situation is with the union, until the sale has been completed.

Sally said: "It's coming along at the speed of a snail, but it's coming along. It'll take as long as it takes.

"It's been frustrating, but I can't make the market move any faster than it is."

The results for UCU vice-president and

UCU vote result in full

Number of ballot papers distributed: 117,918

Number of ballot papers returned: 15,045

Number of valid ballot papers: 14,717

Sally Hunt: 10,776

Mark Campbell: 3,941

Turnout: 12.8%

other elected officials should be available early next week.

Sale of NSA due to be finalised

Nick Reinis

@fenickr

Conference and event organiser Neil Stewart Associates (NSA) has been sold within three days of going into administration.

Andrew Stoneman and Matt Bond, from the financial advisory and investment banking firm Duff & Phelps, were appointed joint administrators to the firm, which hosts events in sectors including further education, on March 5.

However, on March 8, the administrators confirmed that a sale had been agreed, although the buyer is yet to be identified.

NSA told *FE Week* that "a substantial investment in online television, the scale of training and conference cutbacks in the public sector and the lack of bank finance for small businesses" had been the factors leading to administration.

Neil Stewart, chairman and chief executive of the firm, said: "We have appreciated the support from delegates, partners and speakers at a difficult time and we are determined to keep innovating on events to meet the challenge of an online future.

"The new investment makes that possible."

At the time of going to press, the joint administrators told *FE Week* that they hoped to have the sale finalised within days.

A spokesman for Duff & Phelps said: "Andrew Stoneman and Matt Bond, joint administrators for NSA, have confirmed that they have

agreed a sale of the business and assets of the company and contracts have been issued.

"The administrators are aiming to conclude the sale within the next 24-48 hours. We are adding nothing further at this stage."

NSA which employs 20 members of staff, has been producing public policy conferences and events since its establishment in 1994.

They work with public bodies, membership associations, think tanks, campaign groups, voluntary organisations and the commercial sector.

The firm is due to hold a conference on Information, Advice and Guidance on Thursday and Shared Services for Further Education on March 26.

The events will still take place as administrators had been running the firm as a "going concern" prior to the sale.

Independent to the conference division, NSA also offers a press and public relations, campaign planning and communications consultancy service.

At the time of going into administration, Mr Stoneman said: "The conference sector is one that has been particularly badly hit by the downturn in corporate discretionary spending in recent years, no more so than in the public sector.

"The company has a prestigious client list and we are actively seeking a buyer for the business as a going concern.

"We are reviewing all options and for the time being it is business as usual whilst we conduct our search."

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TRIBAL



FE Week investigates

BIS Select Committee to hear evidence from the CEO of Elmfield Training Ltd

Nick Summers
@SummersNicholas

Elmfield Training Ltd has been called upon by the Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS) Select Committee to give evidence for their inquiry into apprenticeships.

The training provider is one of six organisations, including Morrisons, Microsoft, Carillion, Babcock and Robinson Brothers, which has been contacted by the committee to give evidence.

Gerard Syddall, company director and 95 per cent shareholder of Elmfield Training, will be representing his company during the session.

Mr Syddall told *FE Week*: "When we heard about the BIS inquiry we expressed a real desire through the National Apprenticeship Service (NAS) to talk to the committee.

"I am delighted that we have been given a chance to contribute to the very important debate about the future direction of apprenticeships."

Elmfield Training has been in the public spotlight since *FE Week* reported in July 2011 their involvement in 12-week apprenticeships through Synapse, and that they had accumulated £12.3 million in pre-tax profits for the financial year ending in September 2010, on a turnover of £33.8 million.

The Skills Funding Agency (SFA) first contracted with Elmfield Training in 2010/11 academic year for almost £24 million. This was doubled to nearly £43 million after the first six months, and for the 2011/12 academic year they have been allocated more than £37 million.

Elmfield Training claim to be "fastest growing vocational training provider in the UK," not least owing to their role as a training provider for Morrisons.

A Freedom of Information request by *FE Week* to the SFA revealed that in 2009/10 Elmfield Training had 4,980 apprenticeship starts with Morrisons, which jumped to 20,380



in the first nine months of 2010/11.

Of these 17,870 were over the age of 25, and the average duration was 28 weeks with 75 per cent studying at Level 2.

Ofsted first inspected Elmfield Training as an SFA prime contractor at the end of July 2011, and graded them as 'satisfactory'.

Mr Syddall also setup his own awarding body, Skillsfirst Awards, in May 2009 to certificate the Qualification and Credit Framework (QCF) qualifications and apprenticeship frameworks delivered by Elmfield Training.

In November, Myra Wall, managing director of Skillsfirst Awards, said: "Thanks to our unique positioning, structure and in-depth sector understanding, we are able to work with training providers and employers to deliver relevant, fit-for-purpose work-based qualifications.

"Although setting up as an awarding body was very demanding due to the rigour of the recognition process in place, we are extremely proud of the growth we have achieved to date and our customer base and qualifications portfolio is rapidly building."

Elmfield Training's history with Morrisons does not stop at the delivery of apprenticeships. It also includes a donation of £200,000 to support a community interest

company setup by Morrisons' HR director.

They gave the financial contribution to Create, a social enterprise which supports homeless and disadvantaged people back into work, to help them continue operating.

A spokesperson at Elmfield Training said: "Elmfield would like to confirm our donation to Create was £200,000. As a responsible business with a management team focused on giving back to the communities in which we operate, we are incredibly proud to be working with leading social enterprise Create to help get some of the most chronically socially excluded people in the country into jobs.

"Both the SFA and the National Apprenticeship Service are aware of our long-standing partnership and of the social impact it has delivered."

Gary Stott, deputy chair at Create, added: "Elmfield is one of the many businesses that have supported us. As we expanded, Elmfield helped fund additional coaches and mentors for our Create trainees.

"We are wholly transparent on this and know it is a contribution that Elmfield is very proud of having made, and I can confirm that this is a sum of £200,000, which is a matter of public record."

Norman Pickavance, according to documents at Companies House, is a company

director and former 33 per cent shareholder at Create, as well as the current HR director at Morrisons.

The latest abbreviated accounts from Create, available at Companies House, which detail up to September 30, 2010, show its fixed assets reduced from £49,499 in 2009 to £28,762 in 2010, despite the £200,000 donation.

Mr Stott added: "Philanthropic support is vital, especially from the business community, without it we would not have been able to help the people we have helped.

"Elmfield, as a business working to get people to employment, is obviously sympathetic to and supportive of our cause."

Create runs a number of food businesses, including a restaurant and production kitchen in Leeds, in order to give volunteers a "sense of purpose and direction," according to Mr Stott.

In addition to its financial contribution, Elmfield Training has seconded three staff to work alongside the staff at Create and offer both coaching and mentoring support to volunteers.

The volunteers at Create work for three days a week with around 60 staff, including chefs formally at Harvey Nichols and La Gavroche, followed by one to two days working with Elmfield Training employees on confidence building, CV writing, basic skills, numeracy and literacy.

The social enterprise also works with a number of firms, including Morrisons, to support people who have been homeless, marginalised or vulnerable, back into a job.

The Create website states: "Morrisons have worked with us at Create to craft a training programme that supports people into employment.

"The aim is to get 1,000 people through our Academy and working in store at Morrisons.

"Starting in Leeds, the first graduates have already joined the shop-floor workforce at the supermarket's new store in Harehills, one of the most deprived areas of the city."

PAC takes evidence on adult apprenticeships

It is not just the BIS Select Committee keeping a close eye on apprenticeships.

The Public Accounts Committee last week held an evidence session on adult apprenticeships after the National Audit Office's report last month. The witnesses were Martin Donnelly, permanent secretary of the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, Geoff Russell, chief executive of the Skills Funding Agency, and Simon Waugh, chief executive of the National Apprenticeship Service.

Key issues were discussed, such as rebadging existing training and short apprenticeships.

Meanwhile, Mr Waugh said some of the biggest skills in the country are with people in the existing workforce.

He said: "It isn't just 16-18s, what about the 35-year-old who has been let down by the system over last 15-20 years of their life? They came out school with very low basic skills.

They are condemned to life of low skill and low paid work.

"And going into the workforce, which we have, is fixing that problem which is inherent in our existing system."

Mr Donnelly also confirmed interim chief executives will initially replace Mr Russell, when he leaves in the summer, and Mr Waugh, when he leaves at the end of this month, while they "work towards developing the Executive Agency model designed to keep all the best parts of the system."



Simon Waugh, Martin Donnelly and Geoff Russell giving evidence to the PAC on Parliament TV

FE Week profile

Peter Cobrin ~ his story

Janet Murray

@Jan_Murray

The National Education Director at notgoingtouni talks to *FE Week*

Having worked in journalism, teaching, public relations, consultancy and even as a mini cab driver - including a spell driving the actor Kenneth Williams to the Shepperton film studios - notgoingtouni's national education director Peter Cobrin has had the ultimate portfolio career.

Raised in Brighton, where he enjoyed an idyllic childhood and developed a lifelong love of Brighton and Hove Albion FC, Cobrin attended the Brighton, Sussex and Hove Grammar School. But after being one of the highest achieving boys in his prep school, grammar school came as a shock. While his fellow pupils were "intensely hard-working," Cobrin was far more interested in playing

"To have to send them an email to say, 'Sorry guys - it's over. You're not getting any money, you'll never get any money, sorry to have wasted your time'... it was a shattering experience"

football and cricket.

Nevertheless, he secured a place on a general arts degree at Manchester University, writing articles for the Jewish Gazette in his spare time. He left after two years, to take a full-time job on the paper and spent the next six years working in journalism and public relations. But his final job - on the Investors' Review - convinced him that Fleet Street wasn't for him. "I am quite happy to get home in the evening, have a meal, sit down with my wife, watch television, go for a walk, and this late night boozy culture wasn't the world I wanted," he recalls.

At 29, Cobrin swapped Fleet Street for a degree course in International Relations at the London School of Economics (LSE) and spent the next five years studying and working as a minicab driver, writing many of his essays in his cab while waiting outside studios and offices for his clients - many of whom were actors and advertising executives.

Having completed his degree, he was doing some private tutoring with students from

the Lycée Français Charles de Gaulle (an independent school in south Kensington, London), when he was asked to fill in for the head of history for a few weeks. Despite having no formal training, he ended up staying at the school for 14 years.

While he loved teaching, Cobrin found it physically and mentally exhausting. He left in 1993, fearing he was heading for burnout. "I think I was tired," he says. "If you are teaching properly, without respite, and without any other people teaching your subject, you've got no cover, and I could sense myself at times on auto-pilot. I mean, no-one else would have realised it, but I knew it."

Having developed an interest in IT, Cobrin spent the next decade doing a mixture of IT consultancy, PR and marketing - in the UK, US and Israel, where he relocated in 1995.

On his return to the UK in 2003, he wanted to return to teaching, but unable to get a job in a state school without a formal teaching qualification, he enrolled on a postgraduate certificate in education (PGCE) in IT at Liverpool Hope University.

Afterwards, he worked as a supply teacher across the north west, including one of the worst performing schools in Salford, which proved to be a big contrast his days at the Lycee Francaise. "Half to three-quarters of the teachers were on supply, there was a resident policemen and the school was due to be knocked down in the summer. I didn't do a lot of teaching, but I did do an awful lot of quite effective classroom management," he recalls.

After several years of supply and short-term contracts, Cobrin was head-hunted for a project management role at Building Schools for the Future (BSF), the previous government's flagship school re-building programme, where he spent eighteen months working in Southend, providing consultancy to support schools, construction and IT companies, and architectural firms.

The day, in July 2010, when Michael Gove announced the end of the programme - with immediate effect - is firmly imprinted in his memory.

While he acknowledges that the programme wasn't perfect and probably "over-ambitious and certainly overcomplicated," seeing young peoples' hopes and aspirations shattered was devastating for everyone involved and brutally mishandled, he says. "When you have spent a year-and-a-half working with a select group of schools, discussing their aspirations for their new resources and facilities...to have to send them an email to say, 'Sorry guys - it's over. You're not getting any money, you'll never get any money, sorry to have wasted your time'...it was a shattering experience."

Without "even a pencil to sharpen," he resigned immediately and returned to his consultancy work and convinced Spencer Mehlman - who had recruited him into the BSF programme and had gone on to found notgoingtouni - he could be its national education director.



Picture by Nick Linford

His latest venture, Apprenticeships England - a forum for those involved in the delivery of apprenticeships - that started as an open LinkedIn Forum in 2010 has now grown to over 3,800 'members'. The group's first conference - held in London last week (see pages 12 and 13) - attracted over 200 delegates, including employers, training providers, colleges and those working at government agencies.

The popularity of the group, founded by Lindsey McCurdy, who has a strong background in training and employer engagement, could be down to its independence. "We are not the AoC, we are not the AELP, we are not a membership organisation...what we seem to be is the platform of choice for people who have issues and concerns about apprenticeships to express them," he says.

Last week's conference centred around what Cobrin believes are the priority areas for apprentices at the moment - the gap in independent careers advice and guidance, ensuring training is consistently of high quality and getting the message out to employers, parents and young people about the benefits of apprenticeships.

Many young people are still unaware that higher education is not the only route to professional success, he says. In many of

the schools he visits through his work for notgoingtouni, young people are not hearing anything about apprenticeships until their first year of sixth form studies - at which point many feel it is too late to pursue the vocational route.

"The real issue is that everybody should be educated and trained to enable them to maximise their potential. That's the core point. What is the right way for that to be achieved is not a one size fits all. There are probably too many universities chasing too many mediocre students, and the question is...what is the value of a mediocre degree from a second-rate university? We know what it costs - it costs almost the same as a great degree from a great university."

What doesn't help - and this is something he has raised with its chief executive Simon Waugh is the National Apprenticeship Service's insistence on referring to apprenticeships as a brand. He explains: "A successful apprentice has worked as hard and deserves the same status and credit as does that first class honours degree from Oxford; different path, equal value. We need to improve the perception of apprenticeships, which means improving the quality of apprenticeship delivery, weeding out the cowboys and weeding out the Mickey Mouse apprenticeships."

FE Week Expert

Understanding the key issues in Human Resources management

City College Norwich and the Bradford Factor approach to sickness absence



taken by managers and HR services to work together to address absence issues. Long-term sickness absence has reduced by close working with managers to intervene promptly to support the member of staff in returning to work wherever possible.

The Bradford Factor places a higher weighting on the number of occasions of sickness and has been instrumental in reducing short-term intermittent absence.

However, it is difficult to say that one of the three methods in the 'triangle' is any more effective than the other:

Since the introduction of the approach detailed above, the college's absence has reduced by 24 per cent. In addition to this, the college places a particular emphasis on staff wellbeing and is continually expanding the wellbeing offer to its staff, frequently responding to suggestions from staff.

Amongst the initiatives on offer are an on-site Occupational Health service, on-site health checks for staff and their partners funded through Simply Health, free flu vaccinations for all staff, on site gym membership and discounts at local gyms and health clubs and clubs and classes held on site.

The range of initiatives on offer is reviewed regularly depending on demand. Staff now approach us with ideas for wellbeing - the latest being the creation of a hula hooping group!

"Since the introduction of the approach detailed above, the college's absence has reduced by 24 per cent"

In 2011, the college was recognised for its wellbeing offer by being awarded the Business in the Community Regional Wellbeing Award.

The challenge for us now is in maintaining staff engagement and a reduced level of absence during periods of significant change and potential reduction in staffing numbers.

*Hilary Bright, Head of HR Services,
City College Norwich.*

City College Norwich is a college of Higher and Further Education with over 14,000 students and 1,000 staff based in Norfolk. About four years ago, one of the biggest HR issues for the college was managing sickness absence both long-term and short-term intermittent absences.

Long-term sickness cases remained unresolved for lengthy periods of time and there was a high level of short-term intermittent absence, which had the larger impact on disrupting service delivery to students.

In order to tackle this, the college adopted a 'triangular' approach to sickness absence management.

Namely, the introduction of a new Management of Sickness Absence Procedure using the Bradford Factor for monitoring and measuring sickness; using an independent absence reporting call centre operated by clinicians for the notifying of sickness absence and offering staff corporate membership of Simply Health.

Whilst the first two measures represented a more robust way of managing sickness absence than methods previously used, membership of Simply Health is seen as a benefit to both staff and the organisation, enabling staff to claim cashback for dental and optical expenses and helping staff to access consultant and therapy appointments faster and thus return to work sooner.

Sickness absence is monitored weekly by the principalship, allowing for prompt action to be

Social media in colleges - When an employee falls foul of the law

Social media is the broad term given to describe the latest evolution of internet and web based communication platforms that enable users to rapidly connect and interact in a variety of different formats.

As employers, FE Colleges are not immune to the ramifications of employees using social media. Quite apart from social media now being used increasingly in recruitment of staff, colleges are also having to contend with dealing with those employees who use (or misuse) social media.

The advantages of social media are plentiful. It is a useful way for colleges to attract learners and demonstrate the college's key strengths. It can also be used internally so that information and knowledge can be shared quickly.

However, the disadvantages should not be underestimated. Colleges could be held vicariously liable for discrimination and bullying where inappropriate comments are posted by employees or indeed learners. Crucially from a college's perspective, their reputation could be seriously damaged internally as well as in the community they serve.

The headlines are all too commonplace as regards employees who are dismissed for making derogatory comments on Facebook or Twitter.

It is also noteworthy that tribunal bundles containing relevant documentation to a case will invariably have print outs from social networking sites and/or other communications as part of evidence to support a particular party's case.

These cases highlight the growing use and issues associated with social media, so much so that ACAS has recently produced guidance on social networking for employers encouraging them to introduce policies on the use of social media at work.

If they have not already done so, colleges should be looking at implementing a social media policy that sets out clear parameters about permitted use during working hours. Colleges should be making it clear to all employees that social media, whilst beneficial, cannot be abused.

Employees should be restricted in referring to the college's name on social media profiles and, where the college's name is appropri-



ate (for example, if a member of staff is on LinkedIn), employees should be given a clear reminder that there should be no derogatory comments about the college, its staff or learners.

Critically, employees should be reminded at all times that out of hours activities on social media websites could still link employees' comments to those of their employer. To that end, colleges must take seriously anything that could bring the college into disrepute, regardless of the time when the communication is made.

If it all goes wrong and a member of staff breaches the college's social media policy, colleges should implement their disciplinary procedures. This will include investigating the issue, informing the employee in writing and holding a hearing, if necessary.

Appropriate sanctions may include written warnings up to and including dismissal without notice or payment in lieu of notice. Colleges should always offer a right of appeal against any disciplinary sanction given. Whilst abuse of social media may result in disciplinary action being taken, it should also be recognised that comments made by employees (or indeed learners in colleges) could be used to form the basis of a grievance. Colleges should therefore ensure that their grievance procedures are robust to deal with such complaints.

*Matthew Kelly, partner at
Thomas Eggar LLP*

FE Week Expert

What next: Raising the participation age



Government spending cuts wrecked these plans and also delayed later proposals in the 1960s to Raise the School Leaving Age (ROSLA).

When this eventually took place in the mid 1970s, lack of planning, poor communications and the absence of a proper curriculum prompted soul-searching among politicians.

Combined with other factors, you can draw a line from the botched implementation of ROSLA to James Callaghan's 1976 Ruskin College speech and the education reforms and National Curriculum of the 1980s.

Ministers encourage schools to teach more history; learning from history is equally important.

So what will happen this time?

The important thing to understand about the policy to raise the participation age is that it is quite likely to be a damp squib. Even before the decision to postpone the use of enforcement powers, this law was going to be difficult.

School attendance laws place duties on parents to ensure their children attend. Compulsory participation, by contrast, is a law which forces students to take responsibility for themselves, which makes it inherently challenging alongside everything else needed to make the

policy work.

Back in 2008, the Association of Colleges (AoC) listed five tests which needed to be passed to ensure the policy's success. These included an appropriate curriculum, financial support for those facing high costs, proper advice, transport and systems to track participation.

“The lack of jobs and the lack of public money will all make full participation difficult to achieve”

The Government of the day responded to our concerns and provided reassurance that things would be sorted out in the years that followed.

Time has passed and the job looks harder than it did four years ago. Unemployment, public spending cuts and the increasingly competitive education environment will all get in the way.

As we explained last summer in an AoC publication called 'Sticks and Carrots', the lack of jobs and the lack of public money will all make full participation difficult to achieve. For the first time in almost 20 years, the

number of 16 to 18-year-olds in education is falling. The reduction in the number of young people partly explains the downturn but won't help secure 100% participation.

The fact that something is difficult does not mean it should be ignored. Rising youth unemployment and continuing economic change make it more important than ever that young people get the best start in life and do not simply drop out of the education system without follow-up.

The good news here is that many colleges are ready for the challenge. There continues to be a ferment of good ideas for re-engaging young people. The challenge they face will be securing necessary funding and support from partners.

Meanwhile, every time the unemployment figures rise, there is a call to action. The Youth Contract is the latest example of a policy designed to tackle participation but it is unlikely to be the last.

Government will continue to come up with policies to tackle unemployment and, although it is not currently planning to use the law to enforce full participation, this does not mean it is not the expectation.

Julian Gravatt, Assistant Chief Executive, Association of Colleges

A good, not 'satisfactory' education for all



Firstly I would like to thank *FE Week* for the opportunity to contribute to this regular column. I'm going to start off with the recent announcement by Sir Michael Wilshaw, HMCI, about replacing the 'satisfactory' judgement with 'requires improvement' and our proposals to introduce 'no-notice' inspections for the FE and Skills sector.

The main driver of these proposals is a firm belief that everyone has a right to a good education or learning experience whatever their age. I am confident, from talking to many of you over the past few weeks, that we

are 'pushing at an open door' in this respect. Nearly three quarters of respondents to our first consultation agreed or strongly agreed that Ofsted should focus its resources more sharply on providers who were satisfactory or inadequate.

By way of context, it is important to remember around 70% of providers in the FE and skills sector are good or outstanding. As noted in last year's annual report, this is a slightly improved picture overall. However, around 1.2 million learners are being trained, educated and supported by providers who are not yet good. Ofsted is determined to raise standards, and through our revised re-inspection arrangements, we aim to significantly reduce the 1.2 million figure.

Some of the detailed comments I have received to date about replacing 'satisfactory' with 'requires improvement' have been about distinguishing between providers who may be on an upward trajectory and those who may be 'stuck'. I agree this difference is really important and equally for the inspection report to be clear on this matter. The proposal to re-inspect provision judged to require improvement more quickly would also enable those who are on the upward trajectory to demonstrate improvement sooner than is

currently the case. We want these changes to support good leadership and management.

I have every confidence that the sector will respond positively to this challenge. I will continue to share good practice where we see it and ensure that our survey reports have an even greater impact. We will continue to support as many sector conferences as we can and will ensure that we release inspection related data more frequently. You may have spotted that we have just this week published our quarterly statistics for learning and skills. Please do take a look on our website.

There are very few places I go at the moment where the topic of no-notice inspection doesn't come up.

“Around 1.2 million learners are being trained, educated and supported by providers who are not yet good”

Ofsted is very familiar with the concept of no-notice inspections. Indeed, in the learning

and skills directorate we currently have a programme of unannounced inspections for prisons and for our welfare and duty of care inspections of the MoD.

The challenge to the FE and skills sector, from my perspective, is about the logistics of ensuring inspectors are able to base their judgements on evidence gathered from a representative sample of the whole provision. We want everyone to be 100 per cent confident that our inspectors are seeing things as they really are, and we don't want providers wasting time preparing for inspections.

For that reason we are currently testing out the logistical challenges and reviewing the benefits of no-notice inspections through a series of pilot inspections.

The first such inspection commenced this week. I can assure you we certainly didn't make a call beforehand to check that it was a 'convenient time to call'. I await the results of the pilots with an open mind, but again, I urge you to make your views known through the consultation – please head over to www.ofsted.gov.uk.

Matthew Coffey, National Director of Learning and Skills for Ofsted.

FE Week gets technical

The Skills Funding Agency have published an updated version of their plans for streamlined and simplified funding. Nick Linford delivered his first webinar, in partnership with Tribal, on the subject. The slides from the webinar are published here in full. Mick Fletcher also passes judgement (see right).

New Streamlined Funding System for Adult Skills

Webinar - in partnership with Tribal
5 March 2012

Nick Linford
Managing Director of Lsect
Managing Editor of *FE Week*

Lsect
Learning & skills ~ events,
consultancy and training

Summary of the proposals

Skills
Funding
Agency

First edition published in October

This edition published last end Feb

Contains non-apprenticeship rates

Rules for Job Outcome Payments

Shadow calculations to be in LIS

Implementation for 2013/14

In partnership with

TRIBAL

Rates 'matrix'

Originally 30 incl. apprenticeships →

Now 40 excl. apprenticeships

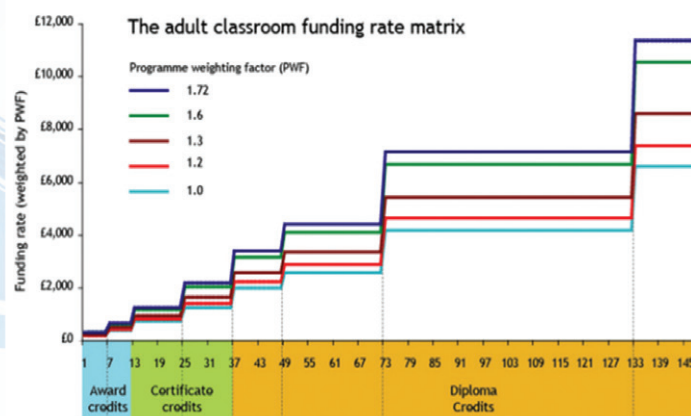
PWF of 1.92 retained for some providers

Based on number of credits (learning time)

Unit's learning aim type	Standard	Low	Medium	High	Specialist
Unit	£150	£168	£195	£240	£258
Award	£500	£560	£650	£800	£860
Certificate	£900	£1,008	£1,170	£1,440	£1,548
Diploma	£2,500	£2,800	£3,250	£4,000	£4,300
16-18 fully-funded full Apprenticeship framework	£4,000	£5,600	£7,200	£8,800	£12,000
19+ co-funded full Apprenticeship framework	£2,000	£2,800	£3,600	£4,400	£6,000

Learning aim type (credits)	Programme Weighting Factor (PWF)				
	1.0	1.12	1.3	1.6	1.72
Award (1-6)	£188	£211	£245	£301	£324
Award (7-12)	£387	£433	£503	£619	£666
Certificate (13-24)	£724	£811	£941	£1,159	£1,246
Certificate (25-36)	£1,265	£1,417	£1,645	£2,025	£2,176
Diploma (37-48)	£1,987	£2,225	£2,583	£3,179	£3,417
Diploma (49-72)	£2,573	£2,882	£3,345	£4,117	£4,425
Diploma (73-132)	£4,170	£4,670	£5,421	£6,671	£7,172
Diploma (133+)	£6,602	£7,395	£8,583	£10,564	£11,356

Rates shown as 'loadband' with cliff edges



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TRIBAL

Modelling the impact on rates

Example 1

NCFE Level 1	Old	SLN GLH	SLN	PW	NFR	Rate
50067680	Award in Employability Skills (QCF)	42	0.09	1	£2,615	£244
5006633X	Certificate in Employability Skills (QCF)	99	0.22	1	£2,615	£575

NCFE Level 1	New	Credits	Rate	Rate	+ / -	+ / -
50067680	Award in Employability Skills (QCF)	6	Award (1-6)	£188	-£56	-23%
5006633X	Certificate in Employability Skills (QCF)	13	Cert (13-24)	£724	£149	26%

So if at top of the QCF credit band it's a funding cut
and at the bottom of the band it's a funding rise

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Modelling the impact on rates

Example 2

Edexcel L3	Old	SLN GLH	SLN	PW	NFR	Rate
50093174	Subsidiary Diploma in Health and Social Care (QCF)	360	0.8	1.12	£2,615	£2,343
50094658	Diploma in Health and Social Care (QCF)	720	1.6	1.12	£2,615	£4,686
50095018	Extended Diploma in Health and Social Care (QCF)	1080	2.4	1.12	£2,615	£7,029

Edexcel L3	New	Credits	Rate	Rate	Variance	Variance
50093174	Subsidiary Diploma in Health and Social Care (QCF)	60	Diploma (49-72)	£2,882	£539	23%
50094658	Diploma in Health and Social Care (QCF)	120	Diploma (73-132)	£4,670	-£16	0%
50095018	Extended Diploma in Health and Social Care (QCF)	180	Diploma (133+)	£7,395	£366	5%

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Other proposals

- Single earnings methodology = in-year delivery (no more provider factor)
- Both Disadvantage Uplift and Area Cost Uplift remain unchanged
- Achievement will be worth 20% of the funding
- Outcome Incentive Payments appear to have been scrapped
- Job Outcome Funding piloted as 10% when learner does not achieve (!)
- Funding to be capped at £4,400 (unweighted), down £176 (-4%)
- Colleges will continue to be paid on profile, subject to year-end reconciliation

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Planned
Schedule
in SFA
document

What	By When
LIS release with shadow funding calculation, learning aim rates matrix and reports for use on 2011/12 data. Shadow funding calculation 2011/12 User Guide published. 2012/13 DLF funding rates confirmed. 2012/13 Funding Rules published.	March 2012
Provider testing and trialling of new software and rates. Technical workshops. First national funding conference. Provider feedback.	April through to July 2012 July 2012
Confirmation of how Basic Skills funding rates fit into the simplified rates matrix. Principles for funding Apprenticeship published. Shadow Apprenticeship rates confirmed.	May 2012
Updated shadow funding calculation and rates matrix finalised for use on 2012/13 data. Shadow funding calculation 2012/13 User Guide published.	July 2012
Providers use LIS reports to compare funding earned and plan for implementation of the new funding system in 2013/14, in consultation with their relationship teams. Provider feedback.	August 2012 through to July 2013
2013/14 Funding Rules and evidence requirements published. 2013/14 simplified funding rates confirmed.	January 2013
New simplified funding system implemented.	August 2013

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Webinar attendees received exclusive Lsect / Tribal branded headphones

Are they trying to simplify funding or simplify FE?

The latest announcement on simplifying funding, ‘A New Streamlined Funding System for Adult Skills’ represents a small step forward.

There is clear evidence that colleagues at SFA and BIS have listened to the sector and have found, like all new brooms before them, that while everyone will buy the idea of simplification in theory its practical application is fraught with difficulty. They note in particular the inevitable trade off between simplicity and fairness and the real danger of unintended consequences.

The result of this listening is well illustrated by the growing size of the rates matrix – in many ways the centrepiece of the simplification proposals. The initial idea floated in the consultation document in 2010 was to have just nine rates – qualifications could come in three sizes (Award, Certificate and Diploma) and three cost bands (cheap, medium and expensive). This was rapidly realised to be too simplistic and replaced by a 20 cell matrix; Units were added to give four sizes of qualifications and the cost bands were increased to five. The current proposal doubles this to 40 cells – 5 cost bands and eight sizes of qualification - but it is still not clear that this is the end of the road.

The paper leaves open the question of an additional cost band for the most expensive programmes; and more importantly the model does not yet cover all FE provision. According to the paper there is more work needed on how basic skills is to be treated and how the model is to apply to apprenticeships, hardly trivial matters. Although it does not highlight the fact more work is also needed to accommodate A levels and programmes of Access to HE (unless the assumption is that the withdrawal of grant funding for over 25s at level 3 will kill this work off entirely)

The steadily increasing complexity of the proposals (perhaps why they are now called ‘streamlined’ rather than ‘simple’) is partly a reflection of reality but there are in addition some clear own goals. The greatest amount of unnecessary complexity is of course caused by the illogical separation of the FE world into pre and post-19 sectors.

It would not be so bad were the two departments and their agencies not determinedly pulling in opposite directions with DfE and YPLA looking for a stable funding system that reflects providers’ costs while BIS and SFA prefer a more turbulent framework where central agencies manipulate prices. Indeed had BIS really wanted to simplify funding it might have looked more closely at the real simplification inherent in Alison Wolf’s proposals – a fixed sum for full time students with a very limited set of price bands.

More complexity however derives from the determinedly centralising approach of BIS of officials despite all the ministerial rhetoric about setting institutions free. Even in a document



on funding simplification BIS / SFA cannot resist contemplating separate rates for large employers, or complicating achievement funding (itself unnecessary) by paying half of it for those who gain employment – but only for a specified subset of students.

The centralising impulse is illustrated most tellingly however by the move to base rates on credit or learning time rather than guided learning hours which reflect teaching time. It is inherently illogical because it is teaching time that incurs costs not learning time and a model based on learning time would have an inbuilt bias towards those subjects and those students best able to cope with a large element of undirected private study. The argument advanced for credit however is that GLH is not regulated.

“The greatest amount of unnecessary complexity is of course caused by the illogical separation of the FE world into pre and post-19 sectors”

To the evident horror of those in Whitehall the basis for funding FE up to now has reflected professional practice across the sector; local judgements about how much support learners need rather than the theoretical assumptions of a few designers at the centre.

A concern to regulate rates mirrors the increasingly detailed regulation of eligibility also being developed by BIS at the same time as talk of new freedoms.

The suspicion grows that SFA and BIS know that a funding system based on the QCF framework does not reflect the complexity of the FE world. Their plan however could be to use a simplified funding system to force the simplification of provision; a system that providers see as responsive but the centre just sees as messy and outside its control. If this is true then learners are sure to be the losers.

Mick Fletcher is a consultant on Further Education

FE Week campus round-up

Prince of Wales amazed by Great Yarmouth College showcase after royal visit to campus



Students at Great Yarmouth College treated the Prince of Wales to a showcase of vocational skills when he visited their campus.

The Prince even tried his hand at construction skills in the brick workshop and later asked catering and hospitality students if canapes they had designed and created specially for him could be boxed for him to take away.

Principal Penny Wycherley and chair of governors Dr Michael Field greeted the Prince on his arrival at the college's two-year-old £6m Home of Construction, the Kier Building.

Second year Level 2 diploma student Ricky

Turner (18) said: "He was surprised by how much cement you need to lay a brick.

"I was a bit nervous, but it was nice to meet him, it's something different."

The Prince also saw a 1950s-design speedboat made by young apprentices on the college's 14-16- programme and stopped to chat to crowds of students and pupils from nearby schools who lined the route to the opposite campus, where he was greeted with singing and dancing by 27 performing arts students.

Mrs Wycherley said: "He was amazed by the sheer variety of the training that happens at the college and how confident and enthusiastic all of the students he met were."

Bicton College launches new EaRTH Hub



Bicton College's innovative new Environmental and Renewable Technologies Hub (EaRTH) has been officially launched.

The event, which saw nearly 200 people attend, was designed to showcase the new centre, to demonstrate the cutting-edge technologies and to give thanks to all those in the community who have been part of its construction.

There were short talks by the principal of Bicton College, David Henley, and the Head of EaRTH, Graham Waddell, as well as inspiring talk by Juliet Davenport, CEO of south west based Good Energy, and a passionate advocate

of sustainable energy technology.

The Hub includes new training bays, solar tubes that let in natural daylight and a biomass boiler. Many of the technologies that keep EaRTH lit, heated, cooled or running are exposed, allowing people to see how they work and to really feel part of this building.

Mr Henley said: "What really struck me tonight was pride - firstly the sense of ownership from the local community who are proud to share this facility with Bicton and secondly is pride of the impressive feat of engineering in an agricultural context that this building demonstrates."



Chesterfield College launches new referee Academy with Premier League star visit

Former Premier League football referee Uriah Rennie visited Chesterfield College to launch its brand new Referee Academy programme.

More than 25 students have signed up to the programme so far, which complements the college's already-established football academies that place young people back into the game, all while they gain their qualifications.

Sports lecturer Neil Cluxton said: "Uriah was great. He's an ex-student so he came back to talk to the children and give them one or two pointers.

"Young people often get a bad press but

we've loads of really keen students, both boys and girls, at the college who get involved in voluntary work and we wanted to see if we can get them in to refereeing too.

"This may be the start of a very successful refereeing career for some."

Many of the students have already started refereeing at the game's youth level and it's hoped that following the academy students will gain a qualification to allow them to officiate senior games locally and earn valuable experience.

The programme was also featured as part of the Get Involved campaign by Sky Sports News.

Alton College Driving Awareness Week



A powerful message was delivered at Alton College during Driving Awareness Week.

The week started with a driving simulator where students tested their driving abilities.

Hampshire Fire and Rescue Service also visited the college to demonstrate how they approach and deal with collisions.

Hundreds of students witnessed volunteer Yegor Ryazanov act as the victim as several officers removed the whole roof from the car using a powerful saw.

Yegor, the current Students' Union President at Alton College, said: "I was very fearful in there.

"Everyone really needs to take care when driving and make sure they are driving at an appropriate speed for the road."



City College Norwich plans £5m building

City College Norwich has unveiled plans for a £5.7m state-of-the-art building for all of its students in the creative arts from September 2013. The planned building will be sited at the college's main Ipswich Road campus, on the site of the former West Lodge accommodation block.

The new creative arts building will support the college's vision to deliver outstanding and innovative creative arts provision, with three purpose-built floors. As well as providing a vibrant space to stimulate students' creativity, the building has been designed to be low-carbon.

Dick Palmer, principal of the college, said: "The college is committed to providing 21st Century learning environments for all of our students and this exciting new building will enable us to provide all of our creative arts students with the facilities they need in one place.



Cornwall College student wins cook-off

A student at Cornwall College has been crowned the winner in a national cookery competition.

Grace Mathews (21), from Gulval, near Penzance, will now have her dish produced by a leading UK supermarket in time for the Queen's Diamond Jubilee later this year.

Grace, who is studying the Professional Cookery Diploma (Kitchen and Larder) VRQ3 course, created her Bramley Crumble Tart using seasonal local produce for another competition earlier this year and decided to enter it for the Bramley Diamond Dishes Competition, organised by the Bramley Apple Information Service.

She said: "I tried to find a seasonal ingredient for my dessert dish and chose Bramley apples, which are in season in February, and everyone loves apples. It seemed perfect timing, so I decided to enter the dish in this competition too."

Following a Facebook campaign, Grace's Bramley Crumble Tart will now be developed to go on sale exclusively in UK Sainsbury's stores.

Doncaster College students add a splash of colour to Old Hall



Anyone who has been to Old Hall at University Centre Doncaster recently will have noticed the walls have been transformed by a splash of colour.

The Hall, which includes four large corridors and several entrance foyers, has been transformed by painting and decorating students from Doncaster College.

The students involved had to take measurements as well as take into consideration health and safety due to working in a live environment.

The project involved various departments working together across the college, including estates, painting and decorating lecturer Neal Preskey and students, marketing and senior management and art lecturer Mike Bunn and students from arts courses.

Errol Michell, from marketing, said: "It would have been easy to select safe but obvious colours on the walls and a transitional approach would have been just that, so change and a visually strong change was the choice."



Walsall College students put on their dancing shoes for special performances

Dancing stars at Walsall College put on a special performance at two of the nation's biggest venues.

Students last month performed a short piece inspired by The Nutcracker and choreographed with support from Dance Xchange and New Adventures, to 100 specially invited guests at the Royal Opera House in London.

It took place at an official presentation of a review into cultural education in England, commissioned by Ed Vaizey MP, minister for culture, communications and the creative industries.

In early February, the students performed

a longer version of the dance at the Birmingham Hippodrome, for the curtain raiser, before the professional cast from New Adventures performed Matthew Bourne's adaptation of The Nutcracker.

Walsall College dance lecturer Faye Cox said: "It was an incredible honour for our students to be invited to such a prestigious event."

"They took everything in their stride and staged a professionally delivered performance."

"They are a credit to the College and were excellent ambassadors for the arts at the event."

Kensington and Chelsea College student duo selected for ITV's Britain's Got Talent

Two Kensington and Chelsea College music students are vying for a final spot on ITV's Britain's Got Talent following their selection as an audition entry.

The talented duo - Louise Manning and Narmine Obad (pictured) - beat hundreds of entries to be selected for the early audition stages of the hit series.

Both students submitted video entries with Narmine (16) singing Duffy's 'Warwick Avenue' and Louise (17) singing Roberta Flack's 'The First Time Ever I Saw Your Face'.

The girls, who are both studying for their Level 2 Diploma in Music, are now hoping to make it to the live TV stages of the competition.

Narmine, from Victoria, said: "I've always been interested in music and grew up listening to all genres of music. It's great that Kensington and Chelsea College encourages students to think big. The course is amazing as I get to learn all about the business side of music as well focus on the creative side."

Paul Hall, head of music at the college, added: "This is a great first step on to a bigger musical platform for our two students. Both are incredibly talented and have a real passion for singing."



Salford City College students get involved in massive Trafford Centre flashmob routine

More than 350 Salford City College students took part in the largest flashmob ever hosted at The Trafford Centre.

Performing Arts students from the Pendleton Sixth Form Centre performed a unique, choreographed routine put together by Dance tutor Hannah Paice.

It lasted for four minutes and was set to a soundtrack spanning the last 30 years - including Michael Jackson and Bon Jovi.

The flashmob, or newly christened 'flashdance', was conceptualised as a challenge for students to create a special event that included students from all year groups and subjects - something they had never achieved before. The Trafford Centre is one of the few public places large enough to host a mammoth

event of this kind.

Justin Webb, from The Trafford Centre, said: "Our customers were knocked for six when the flashdance started - it began with just two dancers in the centre of The Orient food court, and within a minute more than 400 were dancing all around - on the ship and around the balconies."

"Many customers who knew the classic dance moves even joined in."

Dance tutor Hannah Paice said: "We have had enormous fun preparing this for The Trafford Centre shoppers."

"The students have shown real application in coming to grips with this routine, and they loved the spontaneous aspect of the flashdance."

FE Week events...

Battle lines drawn over apprenticeships

Nick Summers

@summersnicholas

Reinforcing standards, the growth in new adult starts and the ever elusive definition of an apprenticeship was at the heart of the agenda for the last session of the Apprenticeships England conference last week.

The event, organised by Peter Cobrin and Lindsay McCurdy of the popular LinkedIn group 'Apprenticeships England', allowed colleges and training providers to voice their concerns about current practice.

Graham Hoyle, chief executive of the Association of Employment and Learning Providers (AELP) reinforced the responses he gave at the Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS) Select Committee evidence session earlier this month, and said the sector couldn't debate the quality of the programme without settling on a definition of the word 'apprenticeship'.

"You can't talk about the quality of anything until you know what you're talking about," he said.

"Sort them out and I'm the first there with the rifle, but I'm not prepared to come along with a blunderbuss"

"Until we've got a very clear understanding of what an apprenticeship is, it's quite difficult to actually start determining how we get the right quality into it.

"I have to say it's a really debilitating issue at the present time within the current debate."

The AELP chief executive said the issues with the programme were "peripheral problems" for the National Apprenticeship Service (NAS) and didn't detract from "a massive success story".

Mr Hoyle said: "Why have I not seen anywhere that we've got 750,000 apprentices out there?"

"When one or two years ago in every city you were still bumping into people on the street saying, 'shame we don't have apprentices any more' - the move in such a short period of time has been absolutely phenomenal."

Mr Hoyle offered a definition for apprenticeships, consisting mainly of a job, a programme which is employer designed and elements which are independently accredited.

With 76.5 per cent of apprenticeships "ticking those required boxes" the duration of an apprenticeship, Mr Hoyle says, is "broadly irrelevant".

"Not totally, but broadly, irrelevant," he told delegates.

"Why are we getting pulled up, particularly about length of duration being the particular quality issue, if all those boxes are properly ticked?"

Mr Hoyle admitted some providers had "clearly pushed the limits" and "crossed the line" in recent months, but advised government to avoid creating a brand new set of rules to combat it.

"We've found out where they are - sort them out," he said.

"But don't do what normally happens in these situations when government money is involved - you set up a brand new set of rules and overlay them on everybody who is actually doing a darn good job."

He added: "Sort them out and I'm the first there with the rifle, but I'm not prepared to come along with a blunderbuss."

Nick Linford, managing director of Lsect and managing editor of *FE Week*, chaired the conference and said it was quite right to call the duration of apprenticeships "the battlefield".

Mr Linford said: "We now know that from the first of August, all 16 to 18 year-old apprenticeships have to last at least 12 months.

"Now we can debate whether that's about quality, but actually that's probably just as much about raising the participation age as it is about quality.

"Because of course if you're doing two levels at less than a year each, they're not going to be



18 and still participating at the end."

The conference chair emphasised that as long as the government continued to fund Train to Gain type provision, apprenticeships should not be seen as the only option for adult employees.

"My worry is we assume apprenticeships are the only thing in the workplace and therefore the only option.

"For the adults where you're not worrying about duration, I would suggest the correct programme might be Train to Gain, which hasn't gone away even though we have all been told not to call it that anymore."

Scott Upton, vice principal of Sandwell College, spoke out about his frustration with short duration apprenticeships and inappropriate frameworks adopted by training providers.

The senior college leader used the new marketing campaign, launched by NAS during National Apprenticeship Week, to highlight the difference between what the government is promoting as an apprenticeship and a significant amount of delivery in the sector.

The radio advertisement in question uses "Joe Bloggs" to claim that the great success of "Joe Bloggs Engineering" is down to his previous apprenticeship.

"If you're running a successful engineering company, you did an apprenticeship, but I bet that your apprenticeship lasted more than 12 weeks," Mr Upton said.

"I bet your apprenticeship definitely lasted more than seven weeks, five weeks, which young people have been presented to my college with."

Mr Upton continued by arguing that adult apprentices aged 25 and above were damaging the reputation of apprenticeships.

"I bet also that Joe's apprenticeship was completed when he was a young lad," he said.

"Not when he was 30, or 40, or 50, that's adult training - that is not an apprenticeship, it's different and it's polluting the brand."

The vice principal also suggested implementing a minimum duration for apprentices aged 19 to 24, along with making them fully funded and scrapping all adult apprenticeships aged 25 and above.

"An apprenticeship is for young people, 16 to 24 and you should get the full amount of money for it," he said.

Karen Woodward, a divisional apprenticeship director at NAS, was also among the panel speakers and agreed there were some problems with the apprenticeship programme.

"There are a whole set of issues around apprenticeships that we still need to reflect upon.

"There are fewer employers, our apprenticeships are shorter in duration and most of them are at a lower level than some of our international comparisons."

The NAS representative also agreed with Mr Hoyle and said more needed to be done to clearly define what an apprenticeship is.

"Quality is elusive but when you see it, you really understand what it is," she said.

"When you see a fantastic apprenticeship, you could bottle it and want to present it right across the country"

The event, which was the first of its kind held by the Apprenticeships England group, was a huge success.

The original format, which stripped away PowerPoint prompts and actively encouraged audience participation, gave training providers the chance to hold key stakeholders to account.



The Apprenticeships England conference was held at the Honourable Artillery Company in London, and was attended by more than 200 delegates

Pictures by Nick Summers



Lord Knight of Weymouth gave the opening address



Scott Upton, vice principal of Sandwell College speaks out



Karen Woodward, NAS said quality was illusive



There was plenty of opportunity for audience participation, with a wide range of comments and questions to the panel



Peter Cobrin, notgoingtouni, organised the conference, which included (from L-R) Liz Green, OCR, Karen Woodward, NAS, Scott Upton, Sandwell College, Jack Farren Kerr, Pearson, Graham Hoyle, AELP on the panel



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The closing date for receipt of application forms is Friday 16 March 2012 and interviews will be held later in the month.

The start date for this post is 28 August 2012.

*In order to comply with the religious ethos of the College this is a Genuine Occupational Requirement under the Employment Equality (Religion or Belief) Regulations 2003.

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Maternity cover - fixed term contract – to January 2013

Circa £36,000 p.a.

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- An understanding of policy issues & developments that drive the market

An application pack, job description and person specification are available from: Jenny Fairbrother or Matthew Russell of OCN Eastern Region, Tel: **01206 873023**; Email: hr@ocner.org.uk

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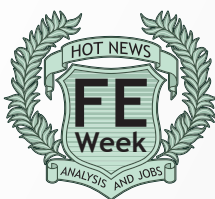
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FE Week Sudoku challenge

4	1		2			6		5
	5			1		9	8	2
3	2				9			
		3		7				4
	9		6		8		7	
2				9		3		
			7				4	6
1	8	5		4			2	
6		7			3		5	9

Difficulty:
EASY

How to play: Fill in all blank squares making sure that each row, column and 3 by 3 box contains the numbers 1 to 9

Solutions: Next week

		5			9		7	
	9		2			6	3	
		1				9		2
	7			4	5			
	8						6	
			8	7			4	
7		9				5		
	3	6			2		1	
	2		1			3		

Difficulty:
MEDIUM

Last Week's solutions

4	1	9	2	8	7	6	3	5
7	5	6	3	1	4	9	8	2
3	2	8	5	6	9	4	1	7
8	6	3	1	7	2	5	9	4
5	9	4	6	3	8	2	7	1
2	7	1	4	9	5	3	6	8
9	3	2	7	5	1	8	4	6
1	8	5	9	4	6	7	2	3
6	4	7	8	2	3	1	5	9

Difficulty:
EASY

2	5	3	9	7	4	1	6	8
4	8	7	3	6	1	9	5	2
1	6	9	2	8	5	4	3	7
6	9	2	1	3	8	5	7	4
5	1	4	6	9	7	8	2	3
7	3	8	4	5	2	6	1	9
9	7	6	5	4	3	2	8	1
3	4	1	8	2	6	7	9	5
8	2	5	7	1	9	3	4	6

Difficulty:
MEDIUM

FE Week mini-mascot

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